

# Jewish Day-School Growth in Toronto: Freeing Policy and Research from the Constraints of Conventional Sociological Wisdom

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The recent growth of Jewish day schools in the United States and United Kingdom has consistently been attributed to the declining appeal of public education among minority groups in general and the Jewish community in particular. In this article I review the interpretative heuristic that lies behind this claim, and ask whether this heuristic accounts for day-school growth in Toronto. I examine previously unpublished school enrolment data and conclude that Jewish families are neither in flight from the Toronto public school system nor are they heading in increasing numbers to day schools. I suggest, therefore, that the prevailing cross-cultural paradigm for day-school growth needs reassessing in a Canadian context and perhaps beyond.

Keywords: Jewish day school, school choice, cross-cultural analysis

L'essor récent des externats juifs aux États-Unis et dans le Royaume-Uni a été souvent attribué au déclin de l'attrait qu'exerce l'enseignement public sur les minorités en général et la communauté juive en particulier. Dans cet article, l'auteur examine l'heuristique interprétative qui est sous-jacente à cette affirmation et se demande si cette heuristique explique l'essor des externats à Toronto. Il analyse des données non publiées jusqu'ici sur les inscriptions et conclut que les familles juives ne sont ni en train de fuir le système d'enseignement public ni en train de se diriger en nombre croissant vers les externats. Il formule plutôt l'hypothèse que le paradigme transculturel dominant relatif à l'essor des externats a besoin d'être réévalué dans un contexte canadien et peut-être même plus vaste.

Mots clés : externat juif, choix d'école, analyse transculturelle

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For much of the twentieth century, Jewish parents in English-speaking countries have sent their children to one of two types of schools: religious supplementary schools or all-day parochial schools. The religious supplementary schools operate during evenings and weekends outside the hours of the public school system. The all-day parochial schools offer a dual curriculum of Jewish and general studies, outside the public school system. Until recently, most parents chose the supplementary schools,

with their children learning the particulars of Judaism in denominationally sponsored schools but receiving the rest of their education in government-funded public schools (Tulchinsky, 1992).

Over the last two decades, however, the number of children educated in Jewish all-day schools has increased at an unprecedented rate (Jewish Educational Services of North America & United Jewish Communities, [JESNA & UJC] 1999; Schick, 2000a; Valins, Kosmin, & Goldberg, 2001). In Britain and the United States, these developments have attracted a substantial body of press commentary. Some tell this story in romantic terms where the charms of parochial education are seen to have lured the Jewish community after a long-running affair with public schooling. Others employ a more tragic tone, claiming that the day-school phenomenon threatens to erode a deep consensus about how Jews educate their children (see Beinart, 1999; Murphy, 2001; Rocker, 2000; Shrager, 2002).

Although much popular speculation has occurred about the burgeoning popularity of day-school education, it remains difficult to determine the significance of these developments or the extent to which their causes transcend local communities and contexts. Sarna (1998), in a study of the history of Jewish education in the USA, has argued that the supplementary school model dominated for so long because it provided a satisfactory solution to "the most fundamental question of Jewish life: how to live in two worlds at once, how to be both American and Jewish, part of the larger society and apart from it" (p. 9). From his perspective, the move to day schools reflects a changed assessment of the best means for Jewish people to negotiate their way in America.

In this article I assess whether it is possible to draw such a conclusion from changes in school choice in Toronto, a city that is home to Canada's largest Jewish community. There are few communities where the shift from supplementary to parochial Jewish schooling has been more dramatic. By reviewing some previously unpublished data concerning Jewish school enrollment in Toronto, I want to query whether day-school growth in the city can be attributed to the same root causes identified as responsible for the turn to day schools in England and the United States. In this way, I intend to reappraise if not challenge what, in recent years, has become an increasingly dominant account of changes in Jewish school choice worldwide. Although in its specifics this article examines changing educational preferences within Jewish communities in the United States, Britain, and Canada, my analysis of the Toronto data raises profound questions about the constraining effects of conventional sociological wisdom.

## DAY-SCHOOL GROWTH IN THE USA AND UK

Many scholars view the growth of Jewish all-day schooling as one of the most remarkable social facts of American Jewish life since the Second World War (Ackerman, 1989; Wertheimer, 1999a). In 1944, there were 39 day schools in the United States, most of them in New York City; by 1982 there were more than 550. Today there are almost 700 schools located in 33 states and the District of Columbia (Schick, 2000a). As the number of schools has increased, so too has the proportion of Jewish school-age children enrolled. It is estimated that in 1962 pupils in day schools numbered 60,000; by 1982/83 some 104,000 students, representing about 10% of the Jewish school age population (Della Pergola & Schmelz, 1989); and in 2000 approximately 200,000 students, that is, nearly one quarter of all Jewish school-age children (Schick, 2000a).

It is difficult to gauge the full scope of these developments in national terms because of the disproportionate number of day schools in the Greater New York area, where some 110,000 students are currently enrolled (Schick, 2000b). Nevertheless, given that for much of the twentieth century American Jews advocated vocally for "common schools for the children of all the people" (Dushkin, 1918 p. 40), it seems as if a sea-change in Jewish political-cultural norms has occurred, with many Jewish children now attending private, parochial, all-day schools where their families must pay fees of \$5,000 to \$18,000 (\$US) a year (Wertheimer, 2001).

Data from England (where many if not most Jewish day schools have been state-aided since 1944) offer an even more vivid indication of a decisive turn to the parochial model. A recent report from the United Kingdom shows that for the first time in the history of Anglo-Jewry, a majority of Jewish children now attend all-day Jewish schools (Miller, 2001). As in the United States, the day-school population has roughly doubled in about 20 years at a time of decline for the total Jewish population (Schmool & Cohen, 1998). In 1975 some 11,000 children, or 20% of Jewish school-age children, attended Jewish day schools. By 2000 this number had grown to 22,620, some 55% of the Jewish children in Britain (Rocker, 2000).

## Accounting for Day-School Growth

An ever-thickening scholarly literature attributes the developments described above to five sets of causes. I survey these below and then, in a later section, examine how well these interpretative categories also account for changes in day-school enrollment in Toronto.

**Decay of public education.** Jewish families have turned their backs on public

schools as part of a larger withdrawal of the middle classes from public institutions left to decay by the public policies of conservative governments in many Western countries (Shapiro, 1996). In an era when publicly funded institutions have become increasingly synonymous with the poor, and when the public perceives standards in public schools as increasingly inferior to those of private schools, Jewish parents, who often are themselves graduates of public schools, have been reluctant to sacrifice their children to an ideal of public education, no matter how strongly felt (Zeldin, 1988). From this perspective, parents have turned to day schools not so much out of an interest in Jewish education per se, but rather because Jewish schools seem to offer a quality of general education superior to that offered by most public schools (Kelman, 1984).

*Jewish embourgeoisement.* The decay of the public-school system has coincided with the steady *embourgeoisement* of the Jewish community and the increased capacity of many families to pay for private education. Increasingly, Jewish parents have chosen not between public schools and day schools but between different forms of private education, with the Jewish parochial school as one option (Beinart, 1999). The influence of increased affluence on school choice has been seen most vividly in the creation of "boutique" day schools with small enrolments, catering at great expense to families with particular educational tastes. (According to Schick [2000a], 40% of US day schools enrol 100 or fewer students, and in most instances the geographical location and/or religious orientation of these institutions means they are unlikely to grow much larger.) Diamond (2000) has argued that a kind of religious consumerism has resulted in this phenomenon, made possible by an expanding spending power that has also spawned a substantial kosher-lifestyle industry. From this perspective, increased disposable income among Jewish families has resulted in day-school growth.

Some commentators have framed this account of day-school growth in broader sociological terms by suggesting that the shift to day schools is not only the product of greater spending power, but a reflection of the socio-economic evolution of the Jewish community, which in large part no longer consists of first-generation immigrants (Ackerman, 1989). The two great waves of Jewish immigration to the USA and UK occurred at the start of the twentieth century and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. For new arrivals at those times, the public school system served as an important vehicle for socialization into the majority society. There was little disagreement with Samson Benderley's oft-quoted words, that to "withdraw our children from public schools and establish schools of our own . . . would be fatal to [Jewish] integration" (cited by Wertheimer,

1999b). Today, after two or more generations of deepening assimilation into the majority culture, Jewish parents willingly send their children to separate parochial schools. Either they no longer fear being viewed as outsiders or they have indeed become insiders (Shrager, 2002).

The confluence of multiculturalism and the "school choice" movement. Some have argued that the turn to day schools has less to do with changes within Jewish society and culture than with a transformation in the larger socio-political milieu of Western societies that has seen a surprising confluence in aspects of progressive and conservative educational visions (Shapiro, 1996). Over the last 20 years, an increased receptiveness has occurred to the incorporation of multiculturalism in the public domain (Banks & Banks, 1995; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). This has allowed, with different degrees of integrity and effectiveness, a greater diversity of voices in public schools. It has also legitimized efforts by minority communities to counteract the dissolution of their cultures and identities in the public school system, even if that choice involves withdrawal from the system itself (Miller, 2001). The increased legitimacy of the multicultural project has coincided with the proliferation of calls in right-wing circles for government aid for private schools, or at least for the use of public funds to support separate or distinctive schools. This move, generally couched in a rhetoric of school choice, has seen the advance of voucher programmes and charter schools in the United States and of publicly funded "colleges" or "academies" in the United Kingdom.

The coincidence of these trends has reduced concerns among a number of minority ethnic and faith communities about withdrawing from common public schools to create their own separate schools. In the UK the extension of state aid has led to separate Muslim, Sikh, and Greek Orthodox schools, and to a significant expansion in the state-aided Jewish school system. Within the American Jewish community, it has encouraged some liberal organizations that once advocated for Jewish participation in public education to develop their own networks of non-orthodox day schools. Those who once led opposition to public aid for private religious schools have begun to reassess their stance on the separation of church and state in educational matters (Wertheimer, 1999b).

Concerns about Jewish continuity. Within the organized Jewish community, day schools are invariably depicted as the most effective available vehicle for promoting the development of a distinct Jewish identity at a time when rates of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage have risen to unprecedented levels (JESNA & UJC, 1999). Although it is difficult to determine what issues concern families when choosing schools, little doubt exists that for parents interested in providing their children with a thick Jewish identity, a

polarization of educational options has occurred. Alternatives to day school have withered. Jewish supplementary schools have cut back instructional time from more than ten hours a week to five hours a week or fewer, enabling few such schools to claim that they can provide children with a significant foundation in Jewish literacy. If parents want their children to participate actively in Jewish cultural life, or if, minimally, they seek a better than even chance that their child will marry another Jewish person, the day school may be their only option.

Without a body of research into the calculations behind parental school choice,<sup>1</sup> it is difficult to know how much day-school growth has been vitiated by the pull of the Jewish experiences promised by schools or by the push of forces perceived as threatening the public system. What is more certain is that concerns about the continuity of Jewish culture and identity have strongly influenced the creation of new day schools — the supply rather than the demand side of day-school growth (Himmelfarb, 1989). In the USA, a significant proportion of the new day schools created during the last 10 years has come about as a result of the intervention of activist philanthropic foundations that have identified Jewish day schools as a highly effective means to intensify Jewish awareness and solidarity (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, 2003). In the UK, such bodies have decisively lobbied for government funds to create a new generation of state-aided Jewish schools.

**Population growth in the orthodox Jewish community.** A final but more prosaic explanation for day-school growth appears only rarely in the literature. This account claims that the number of children in day schools has increased because the religiously orthodox sub-groups within the Jewish community, that have always attended day schools in greatest numbers, have grown in size even while an overall decline in the number of Jewish school-age children has occurred (Schick, 2000a). Day-school growth is, thus, not so much a story of shifting preferences from supplementary to parochial models, but of the playing out of two discrete processes. In one, a declining proportion of non-orthodox, Jewish children receive ongoing formal Jewish education (whether in supplementary or day-school settings) as their families become ever more disconnected from Jewish life. In the other, orthodox day schools have proliferated as a result of natural growth in their traditional population. Day schools are not, therefore, replacing supplementary schools; they are simply benefitting from higher fertility rates in their core market.

As with any sociological heuristic, the combined force of these five interpretations does not make it possible to predict or explain choices made by particular individuals at particular moments. These are meta-

narratives that view schools and those who attend them in an undifferentiated fashion. They do not account for nuances in the evolution of Jewish schools, but they do make sense of some striking aspects of day-school growth in the USA and UK: first, and most vividly, the emergence of networks of non-orthodox day schools serving populations that previously articulated a deep commitment to public education; second, a changed tone in the marketing of day schools, which today emphasize the quality of the general education they offer as much as, if not more than, their Jewish character; third, the changed orientation of Jewish Community Federations towards day schools, institutions they once viewed as a costly if not dangerous diversion, but which today they seem frequently to regard as a panacea to all that ails the Jewish community.

#### DAY-SCHOOL GROWTH IN CANADA

How well this heuristic accounts for the development of Jewish schooling in Canada over the last 50 years is open to question. Clearly, it does not fit with the evolution of Jewish education in the province of Quebec, where since the late nineteenth century Jewish children and parents have occupied an ambiguous status in relation to the province's Protestant and Catholic school boards (Brown, 1987; Rosenberg, 1996). For the first part of the twentieth century, Quebec law in fact categorized Jews as Protestant for educational purposes (Elazar & Waller, 1990). More recently, the status of Jewish schools has been "normalized" to the extent that in 1970 private Jewish day schools in Quebec received recognition as Associated Schools in the Public Interest. Since then they received government funding for the secular part of their program, provided they satisfy certain criteria, prominent among which are minimum requirements for French instruction (Weinfeld, 2001). In this context, where day-school fees are relatively low and the public system is perceived as bearing a tradition of inhospitality towards the Jewish community, the proportion of Jewish school-age children in day schools has always been high (it was already 66% in 1981) compared with most other Jewish communities around the world (Weinfeld & Zelkowitz, 1991).

In Ontario, at least, the development of day-school education seems to have followed the same contours observed in the USA and UK.<sup>2</sup> The province's first all-day Jewish schools were launched in Toronto in 1942. These schools — the Associated Hebrew School and the Eitz Chayim School — grew out of the city's two largest Talmud Torahs (traditional supplementary schools), at that time the preferred educational vehicle

for almost all Jewish families. The new schools were orthodox in religious orientation and entirely funded by contributions from parents and private groups.

During the immediate post-war era few additional day schools opened. The majority of Jewish children continued to receive their Jewish education on weekends and in evenings after attending public schools. In 1970, 2,600 children were enrolled in parochial day schools, while 5,300 were enrolled in supplementary schools, either in old-style Talmud Torahs or in the newer denominational supplementary schools operated by suburban synagogues (Klinghofer, 1972).

During the 1970s and 1980s, day-school growth accelerated in communities across Canada. By 1983, at least one day school existed in all 10 Canadian cities with a Jewish population of 2,000 or more (Kutnick, 1989). In Toronto several new schools opened, affiliated with non-orthodox Jewish organizations or denominations. By the late 1970s, a majority of Jewish children who received any form of Jewish education in Toronto received it in day schools. By 1985 Toronto had 11 day schools and 7,055 students at the elementary level and 4 high schools with 795 students. At the same time, there were 6,398 children enrolled in supplementary schools (Shoub, 1991).

Data from the Toronto Board of Jewish Education (Shoub & Levine, 2002) indicate that day-school growth in the Greater Toronto Area has continued at a steady pace over the last two decades with, on average, one new school opening every year. In 2002, there were 20 day schools at the elementary level and 14 at the high-school level, a small number of which were, for the first time, religiously pluralist in ethos. The elementary-school population had increased to a little fewer than 9,000 (constituting about 34% of the total Jewish school-age population) and the high-school population to more than 2,600. In the meantime, the number of students attending supplementary schools had dipped below 5,500, constituting less than one third of the children enrolled in Jewish schools of any kind.

#### Interpreting the Canadian Data

The changes surveyed here correspond in their broad sweep to those observed in the United States and England: the emergence of day schools as a normative educational option; the plateauing and subsequent erosion of enrolment in supplementary schools; and a diversification in the denominational variety of day schools. The Toronto data are distinguished, however, in the timing and scope of day-school growth.



Day-school enrolment gained momentum by the mid-1970s, more than a decade before such a shift developed either in the UK or the USA. It also seems to have occurred since the early 1990s much more at the expense of Jewish supplementary schooling than in the USA, even while, as in America, day schools continue to attract only a minority of all Jewish school-age children.

These local variations can probably be explained by particular aspects in the local Ontario situation, where day schools have received no public funding (as in the USA but unlike the UK) and where public schooling has not been a core political-cultural norm within the wider society (like the UK but not the USA).<sup>3</sup> In general terms, the interpretative heuristic outlined above seems to account very well for day-school growth in Toronto. Its five dimensions readily resonate with socio-political forces operating within the Toronto context.

**Decay of public schools.** In Ontario, at least since the launch of Premier Harris's "Common-Sense Revolution," an uninterrupted decline in funding for public education has occurred. This political decision has produced a widespread perception that a superior education can be acquired in private schools, Jewish or otherwise (Weinfeld, 2001).

**Jewish ennoblement.** Although Toronto is one of the few cities in the world where substantial Jewish immigration continues, the majority of Jewish children in the city are at least second-generation Canadians. Their parents are among the most socially integrated minority groups in the city. They have used their disposable income to build and finance new schools, suburban synagogues, and a range of Jewish stores (Diamond, 2000).

**Multiculturalism/school choice.** Toronto has developed a reputation as one of the most multicultural cities in the world. In this context, it is fully acceptable to deepen Jewish culture and identity through the development of Jewish education, a goal further legitimized in recent years by government enthusiasm for choice in education (Elazar & Waller, 1990).

**Jewish continuity.** Over the last 10 years, several Toronto day schools have been created or enlarged with funding provided by activist philanthropies, such as the US-based Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education and the Avi Chai Foundation. Schools have developed sophisticated programs to deepen the Jewish identities of students and their parents, though it is unknown how important these issues are for parents when they choose schools.

**Demographic growth.** The orthodox Jewish community has grown at a greater pace than all other sectors. Nearly three quarters of the new day

schools to open in the last 20 years have been orthodox in orientation (Shoub & Levine, 2002).

#### BEYOND THE CROSS-CULTURAL PARADIGM

The easy application of these five categories to the Toronto context makes it evident why the interpretative framework described here has shaped sociological discourse (and conventional wisdom) concerning Jewish schooling in Ontario. I argue, however, that the construction of such an easy equivalence between the development of Jewish education in Toronto and other parts of the world should make one wary.

The cross-cultural study of education often operates at a gross level where the specifics of context are blurred to allow the formulation of interpretative constructs that possess the force of generalizability but lack the nuance of the particular. In this instance, the explanatory force of an account that explains the proliferation and growth of day-school education in Toronto in terms of a heuristic that also accounts for the growth of Jewish schools in other English-speaking countries may have stifled the development of policy and research in Jewish education in Ontario. When forces whose provenance extends beyond the context of public education in Ontario inform changes in Jewish schooling, policy makers appear powerless to manage forces that operate beyond their influence. In research terms, an interpretative account of this scope thus acquires a normative quality that either dulls sensitivity to changes when they do occur or encourages attempts to force an explanation of those changes into the framework of an existing paradigm rather than seek out new interpretations.

#### Discrepant Data from Toronto

Over the last decade, changes of significance have been playing out in the demographics of Toronto Jewish day schools that until now, if noticed, have been explained in terms of the existing paradigm. I take a different stance towards these developments, and suggest that four aspects of day-school growth call for refinement of the existing heuristic. Although it may be premature to offer a full explanation of these discrepant phenomena, their identification suggests the need to begin the work of developing a new interpretation of day-school growth in Toronto.

**Stagnation in preschool and grade-1 enrolment.** Between 1982 and 2002, total (K-12) enrolment in Toronto Jewish day schools almost doubled, from 6,888 to 11,527, growth of a similar scale to that in the USA and UK. Even

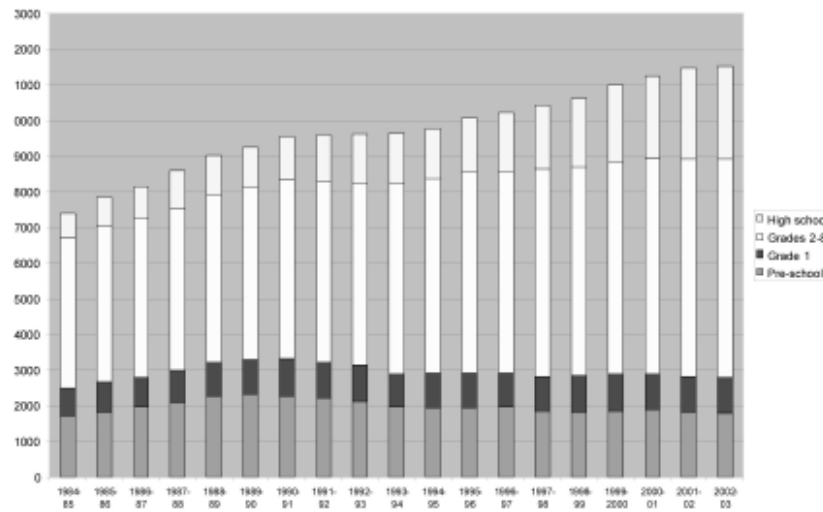


Figure 1. Disaggregated day school enrolment in Toronto, 1984-2003

when one separates pre-school and high-school population from total day-school enrolment, the growth in the elementary sector (grades 1 to 8) has been dramatic, increasing from 4,737 in 1982 to 7,122 in 2002 (an expansion of more than 66%).

A closer look at school population data indicates, however, that forces different from those that led to a rise in day-school population prior to that date produced increases in enrolment since 1990. As Figure 1 shows, increased enrolment in pre-school and grade 1 brought about a substantial part of school growth before 1990. (Between 1984 and 1990 year-on-year growth in pre-school and grade 1 accounted for 38% of overall growth in school enrolment during this period). Since 1990, however, a steady decline in pre-school numbers has occurred (from a peak of 2,343 in 1989 to 1,801 in 2002)<sup>4</sup>. Grade-1 enrolment also reached a peak in 1990 of 1,027 students and has been surpassed in only one year since then. Over the last decade Toronto day schools have continued to grow, but not because they have recruited increasing numbers of new students at the lowest entry levels.

**Growth through retention rather than recruitment.** Historically, far fewer students enrolled in the higher grades of Jewish schools than in the lower ones, a steady erosion at each successive grade level, the steepest decline occurring in grades 6 and 7 at the age of bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah. For many families, day schools provided a useful vehicle to introduce young children to the fundamentals of Jewish culture but by the middle grades

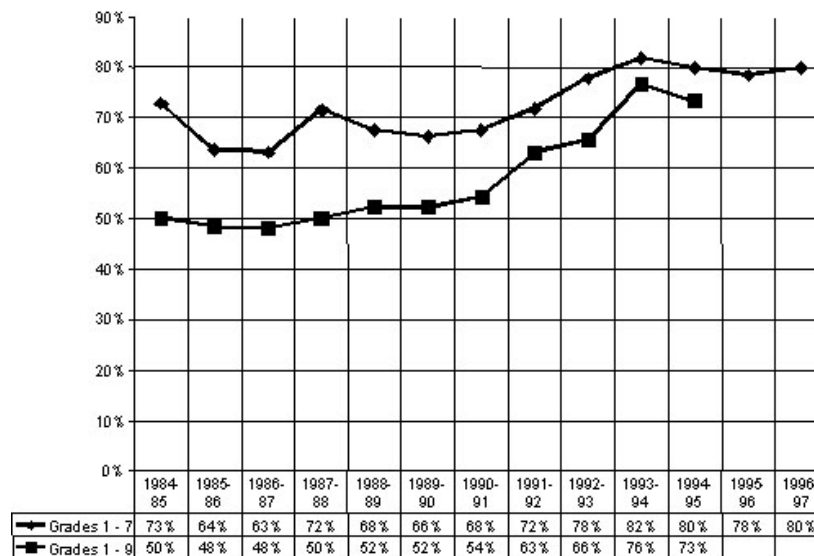


Figure 2 Number of students admitted into grade 7 and grade 9 as a percentage of the number of students admitted in to grade 1 (Shoub & Levine, 2002)

they switched them into secular private or public schools where they expected their children to engage in the real business of education. Figure 2 indicates that in Toronto, a change in this pattern has occurred since the start of the 1990s, as seen most dramatically in the increasing numbers of students continuing on to grade 9 into Jewish high schools where enrolment increased by 140% between 1982 and 1992, and by a further 90% between 1991 and 2001.<sup>5</sup> This confirms that since 1990 children staying longer in schools has prompted day-school growth at the elementary level, and not improved recruitment.

~~School growth in absolute rather than relative terms.~~ In contrast to most Jewish communities in the United States and England, the Jewish community of Toronto has grown steadily for much of the last 50 years. The city has attracted immigrants from Europe in the years after the Second World War, from Israel, North Africa, and the former Soviet Union since the 1970s, and from Montreal since the 1980s.

In a recent effort to forecast demand for day-school places in Toronto, Abba (2002) extrapolated from Statistics Canada 1981 and 1991 census data a measured estimate of the total population of Jewish school-age

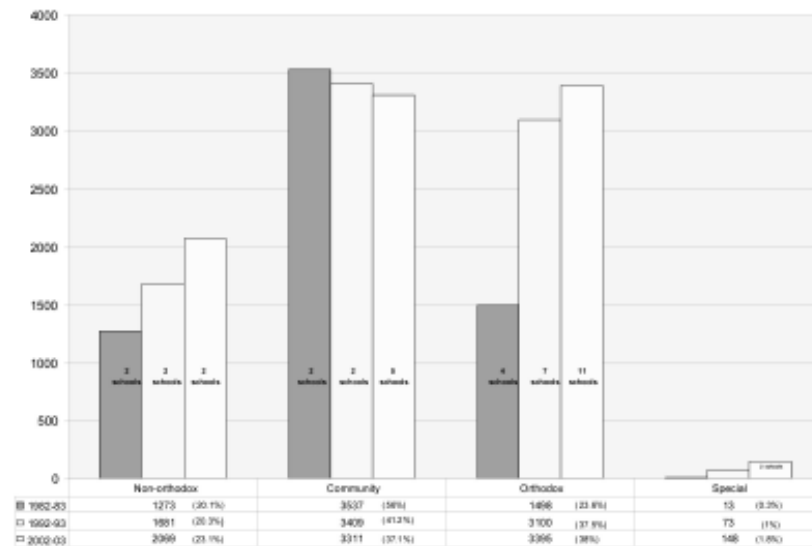


Figure 3 School population in grades 1–8 according to denominational orientation

children between 1981 and 2001. These statistics usefully supplement the picture emerging of enrollment trends. Abba shows that in 1981 13,272 Jews between the ages of 6 and 13 lived in Toronto, and that by 1991 this number had increased by 36% to 18,050. As Figure 1 indicates, Jewish school enrolment in grades 1 through 8 increased over the same period by almost 31% from 4,633 to 6,056 students. It seems, then, that the proportion of 6- to 13-year-old Jewish children attending elementary day school actually fell from 34.4% in 1981 to 30% in 1991.

Although day school enrolment during the 1990s recaptured higher proportions of the Jewish school-age population, it did not exceed a peak of around 34%. During the 20-year period from 1981 to 2001, when the total day-school population grew by more than 66%, increases in enrolment paralleled but rarely exceeded natural increases in Jewish school-age population (of some 64%–65%) during the same period.

**Orthodox growth and general fragmentation.** The denominational orientation of the day schools that have grown most dramatically during the last 20 years is highly ambiguous.<sup>6</sup> As seen in Figure 3 the expansion of the Orthodox sector has accounted for a significant part of aggregate enrollment growth, particularly in the 1980s.

This phenomenon contrasts sharply with the decline in the fortunes of the community sector, that is, those schools with heterogeneous populations in terms of denominational affiliation. The proliferating range of orthodox school options, often catering to particular religious sensibilities, has attracted some families away from the community sector. Nevertheless, in contrast to the United States, where more than 75% of students attend orthodox schools (Schick, 2000a), a majority of Jewish children in Toronto continue to attend either non-orthodox or community day schools, as they have done for the last 20 years. In Toronto, at least, it does not seem as if the fertility of the orthodox Jewish community is the primary cause of school growth.

## CONCLUSION

Discussion of day-school growth in Toronto has rarely gone beyond an analysis of aggregate increases in school population and the erosion of enrolment in supplementary schools. This continued increase in aggregate enrolment may have distracted attention from significant changes in the patterns that lie behind the growth in total school population. Drawing on the findings above, I have found the following patterns to suggest an alternative explanation for increased growth among Jewish schools:

- The proportion of Jewish children in Toronto attending day school in any given year has barely changed since the early 1980s.
- Over the last 20 years, increases in day-school enrolment are best attributed to increases in the potential school-age population.
- Since 1990 net increases in enrolment have occurred despite a slowdown and decline in recruitment into the youngest grades of the day-school system.
- A significant part of the increase in the day-school population has occurred because students have deferred transferring from the Jewish system into the non-parochial system.
- Although the growth of the orthodox Jewish community has made a disproportionate contribution to the overall increase in day-school population, a majority of children enrolled in day schools still attend community or non-orthodox schools.
- Although some part of the increase in day-school population may have come at the expense of enrolment in supplementary schools, no evidence exists to confirm that day-school growth and supplementary school decline are causally related.
- The proportion of Jewish children receiving formal Jewish schooling in Toronto in any given year has more or less steadily declined since 1992.

In general terms, then, Jewish parents in Toronto have not turned to day schools for the reasons that have attracted so much comment in the United States and the United Kingdom. Of course, enrolment has increased dramatically, but in Toronto different forces have been at work. During the 1970s and 1980s, day schools benefitted from increases in the Jewish school-age population, but more recently they have profited from a tendency among students to stay longer in the system. The situation is more complex than that conveyed by aggregate enrolment statistics. Although student rolls have increased and the proportion of Jewish children attending day schools in any one year has remained stable, the proportion of Jewish children in Toronto who at some point in their lives receive a day-school education has probably declined since the early 1990s. The tendency of those already enrolled in day schools to stay longer in the system has disguised the decline.

These findings sharply contradict claims that day-school growth indicates intensified Jewish parochialism. They also call into question the prevailing assumption that Jews have abandoned public education in recent years. If Jews are in flight from the public school system (and no evidence from my data indicates that they have been), they are not rushing in increasing numbers towards day schools. At most, I conclude that those who have chosen to enrol in the youngest day-school grades are not now transferring into the public school system as soon as they once did.

#### Questions for Further Research

Although these trends do not fit well with the prevailing interpretative heuristic of day-school growth, I do not yet have a clear account for the situation in Toronto. Further research will help determine whether the patterns seen here represent one or some of the following:

- a) ~~Fall-out from the galloping increase in the price of day-school education.~~ If, as Abba (2002) has indicated, average (inflation-adjusted) tuition in Toronto day schools increased between 24% and 30% from 1991 to 2001, the declining proportion of Jewish families enrolled in the system may reflect a shrinking proportion of parents able to pay for day-school education (contrary to the impression created by the economic determinism of the prevailing heuristic). In these terms, day schools are a more and more exclusive option for an increasingly loyal clientele.
- b) ~~A polarization in Jewish identification.~~ The fact that a smaller proportion of Jewish children is entering the system and then staying longer may indicate that fewer Jewish families are seeking an intensive Jewish education for their children, while those who do value such an

education seek to extend it over a greater number of years. School choice, from this perspective, becomes a sensitive barometer of polarizing Jewish cultural commitment.

- c) A fact of a larger shift from public to private education. From this perspective day schools are no more or less popular than they were 20 years ago. Rather, they face stiff competition from other (non-parochial) private schools that have become increasingly popular over the last two decades (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Having loosened the constraints of conventional sociological wisdom in this paper, I have begun to construct a new narrative of the Jewish relationship to public education. By questioning the application of the prevailing cross-cultural paradigm to the Toronto context through looking at the patterns behind aggregate data trends, I have presented an opportunity to develop a different Toronto or Canadian story of Jewish school choice. As I have indicated, that new story might be told in at least three different modes (related to rising day-school fees, polarizing Jewish identification, or a general shift from public to private schools), all of which have the potential of being translated into other socio-political contexts.

It may be, in fact, that if increases in day-school enrolment in other communities are also submitted to the kind of disaggregated analysis employed here, there will be cause to question the master narratives that seem to make so much sense elsewhere. In an unusual reversal of the usual tendency in sociological circles, it might turn out that questions brought to the surface through the analysis of day-school growth in Toronto provoke non-Canadian communities to think again about conclusions drawn from their more recent experience of the turn to day schools.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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#### NOTES

1. I am aware of only one effort in recent years to research in systematic fashion the school choices of Jewish families. In 2001, Shahar produced a series of reports for the Bronfman Jewish Education Centre concerning school choice in Jewish Montreal, a community that is unlike most other communities in North America. His work was collected in a series of eponymous studies, such as "A telephone survey of parents who sent their children to non-Jewish high schools" (Shahar, 2001a) and "A telephone survey of parents who



interrupted their child's tenure in a Jewish high school" (Shahar, 2001b).

- 2 For the remainder of this article I will focus on changes in enrolment in Toronto. Toronto is home to Canada's largest Jewish community, and is readily compared to Jewish communities in the major cities of the USA and UK. In addition, and of no small significance, it is the only community in Canada where a disaggregated analysis of day-school enrolment is possible, thanks to the annual release of comprehensive school registration and demographic data by the local Board of Jewish Education (see Shoub & Levine, 2002, and Abba, 2002).
- 3 In 2002 after many years of campaigning by minority faith communities, the Ontario government awarded a tax credit against part of the cost of private schooling. The credit was planned to expand from \$700 a child to some \$3,000 over a five-year period, but was cancelled by the Liberal government elected in October 2003.
- 4 Pre-school enrolment is notoriously difficult to estimate because a high turnover of schools occurs in this sector, and many institutions are not formally registered with the Jewish community. In presenting these figures, I have assumed that the data inconsistencies are no more acute in one year than any other.
- 5 At this time, I have not been able to track how many of the students entering grade 9 are those who originally entered grade 1 and how many have taken up places vacated by students who have left the system. The retention statistics represent a net calculation, reflecting an assumption that at grade 9 the numbers coming into the system for the first time are small compared to those who continue grade by grade.
- 6 The denominational classification of day schools is a treacherous task when the differences between one brand of orthodoxy and another can be subtle, or when a school's ethos can differ significantly from the profile of its student body. In categorizing Toronto schools, I have followed Schick's (2000a) typology, not so much because his distinctions fit well with the Toronto context but because his schema affords the opportunity of comparing the composition of the Toronto system with the American one.

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